

revolutionary character and effect of the publication, forty years ago, of a work which so fully effected its transformation of opinion that its main points are now taken for granted. Actually, however, these volumes revealed a world, at the time regarded with dread largely because it was shrouded in darkness. They also revealed a person, till then as little known—the authentic British working-man. Contemporary history took on a new meaning, contemporary thought, and even contemporary feeling, were given a new direction. The method of approach to the writing of history was, henceforth, altered, so was its substance. Inheriting this alteration, we take it for granted. No English writers did as much to bring it about as did the Webbs.

The intellectual origins of such a work are worth tracing. Thanks to *My Apprenticeship*, supplemented by an article written by Sidney in 1928, they can be traced. With his habitual frankness he says it seems to him to-day

"a little strange that Trade Unionism, which came near to monopolising my thinking for years on end, did not reach me effectively till I was thirty. It had not place in the five or six years of study and discussion out of which the Fabian Society emerged. It is scarcely alluded to in *Fabian Essays*.

The same attitude of thought was typical of the whole past history of British Socialism. Karl Marx himself gave to Trade Unionism, in his view of the social organisation of the future, no greater importance than, right down to the last decade

of the nineteenth century, the Fabians had done
"

What Karl Marx, the Social Democratic
Federation,
and the Fabian intellectuals alike overlooked,
Beatrice
Potter perceived In her mind, the idea of
writing a full
scale description of the Trade Union
movement was
definitely born in 1889, and for reasons that
implied a
clear, though of course not at that stage a
full, under-
standing of its significance.